

## **EDITORIAL**

### **STRETCHING OUR WATER**

*Population is surging, but conservation can ease one of its outgrowths*

**Published by: Long Beach Press Telegram**

**Friday, July 29, 2005** – California's continuing surge in population will generate shortages that can be tolerated, such as inadequate housing and freeways, and one that can't: inadequate supplies of water. By 2030, the state will need 40 percent more of it.

What's to be done? Interestingly, if the rest of the state did what Long Beach does, the specter of a shortage would vanish. Average water use per capita in urban areas is 232 gallons per day, whereas in Long Beach it is only 140. Conveniently, that happens to be almost exactly 40 percent less.

How does Long Beach do it? By promoting conservation aggressively. According to Water Department records the city's population has gone up 100,000 in the past 20 years but water usage has not gone up at all.

What has worked? More efficient toilets, washing machines and faucets; heavy use of recycled water for parks and golf courses; identifying the biggest water users and helping them cut back; and many other techniques. One of the latest is one of the most promising: encouraging the use of native plants for landscaping.

Most of us use most of our water at home to water stupid little lawns that are mostly brown anyway in the winter, as well as plants that would be happier in a rain forest. If we landscaped a little differently, we could have more imaginative and more attractive surroundings and use much less water to keep them healthy.

We're not talking just cactus and scrub brush. For an idea of how colorful and well designed a yard can be with less-thirsty native plants, take a drive out to a community like Claremont, where residents seem to compete with each other for the most striking landscapes, or have a look at sample gardens at the Long Beach Water Department.

The department is involved in other conservation projects, including an underground water storage project in conjunction with the city of Lakewood, to be financed with \$3.1 million from state water bonds. An earlier project, more than three times bigger, will store 13,000 acre feet (4.2 billion gallons) of water that can be tucked away during rainy seasons, when water is overabundant, for use when the inevitable dry periods follow.

The department gets a lot of attention from a more experimental project designed to show that desalting ocean water can be more nearly cost-effective than once believed. But nothing beats conservation for cost-effectiveness.

As the hordes pour into California, there will be no easy solutions to clogged freeways and overpriced housing. But water? Californians can manage, if they take a cue from Long Beach.